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Assessment and Rating in Family Day Care

Introduction

The term **Assessment and Rating** is sometimes enough to make anyone feel nervous, but it doesn't have to be that way. Knowing what to expect and how to prepare for Assessment and Rating can often lead to feeling more comfortable with the process.

When you feel more comfortable with the process, you are more likely to look forward to the opportunity to share and celebrate what you and your service do well.



Source: Kelly's Family Day Care – Botany FDC.

The what, why and how the Assessment and Rating is part of the overall quality improvement process

The **Assessment and Rating process** (A&R) is when a registered service including Family Day Care and centre-based services, is assessed against the 7 Quality Areas of the National Quality Standard (NQS), and then given an overall quality rating based on these results.

Services are assessed and rated against the NQS to:

- ▶ Ensure the National Laws and Regulations are known, understood and followed (compliance)
- ▶ Encourage the delivery of quality education and care through a cycle of self-assessment and continuous improvement
- ▶ Improve knowledge and access to information about the quality of services to help families make informed decisions about their child's education and care.

The National Quality Framework



Guide to NQF, p.9.

The A&R process is a requirement under the National Quality Framework (NQF). The NQF was introduced in 2012 to improve education and care by providing a National Quality Standard and approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement across family day care, long day care, preschool/kindergarten and outside school hours care services. It aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency through:

- ▶ The Educational and Care Services National Law and Regulations
- ▶ The National Quality Standard
- ▶ The National Approved Learning Frameworks
- ▶ An assessment and quality rating process by the Regulatory Authority in each state and territory
- ▶ A Regulatory Authority in each state and territory responsible for the approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services in their state or territory and
- ▶ A national body – Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), which guides the implementation of the NQF and works with regulatory authorities.

It’s important to become familiar with your requirements as a service leader or educator under the NQF to ensure you continuously meet these in your everyday practice as well as when you are called for A&R.

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority



Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority™

The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) oversees the NQF working with governments and the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector to improve quality outcomes for children, implement changes that benefit children birth to 13 years of age and their families and monitor and promote the consistent application of the Education and Care Services National Law across all states and territories. ACECQA helps by:

- ▶ Approving qualifications for people who work in education and care services
- ▶ Training, testing and providing resources to state and territory regulatory authority authorised officers
- ▶ Awarding the Excellent rating

- ▶ Undertaking second tier reviews of quality ratings
- ▶ Hosting the National Quality Agenda IT System
- ▶ Publishing guides and other resources
- ▶ Publishing the national registers of approved providers and services (including their quality rating).

Hop onto the [ACECQA website](#) to find a suite of resources available to you to support your A&R journey and everyday practice. It also includes [Family Day Care specific resources](#).

Did You Know?

ACECQA does not rate and assess services – only if a service has applied for the Excellent rating. Your service is assessed and rated by your Regulatory Authority.



Source: Kidsville Family Day Care – CASS FDC.

Your Regulatory Authority

Each state and territory have their own Regulatory Authority (RA). Your RA is responsible for the approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services in your state/territory.

ACT Children's Education and Care Assurance, Early Childhood Policy and Regulation, Education Directorate, ACT Government	NSW Early Childhood Education Directorate, NSW Department of Education	NT Quality Education and Care NT, Department of Education
QLD Regulation, Assessment and Service Quality, Early Childhood and Education Improvement, Department of Education	SA Education Standards Board	TAS Department for Education, Children and Young People
VIC Department of Education and Training	WA Department of Communities, Education and Care Regulatory Unit	

It's your RA that rates and assesses your service against the National Quality Standard and the National Regulations. They monitor and enforce compliance with the National Law and Regulations, including receive and investigate serious incidents and complaints and they work with ACECQA to promote continuous quality improvement and educate the sector and community about the NQF.

If you have any A&R or compliance questions, you can contact your RA or check out resources they offer to support you on their website. Although A&R is a national process there are some state or territory specific differences you need to be aware of.

An Authorised Officer from your RA conducts each A&R experience including the visits. They are trained by ACECQA and their RA to triangulate evidence by following an Observe, discuss, sight method of gathering evidence to confidently assess how your service meets the Elements and Standards of the NQS, as well as compliance with the National Law and National Regulations.

Authorised Officers have been informed about the unique characteristics of Family Day Care and that the A&R visit

should provide an opportunity for all services to demonstrate the way they meet the NQS.

Specific training is provided to build knowledge and understanding of assessing each Quality Area in Family Day Care services and to adopt a Family Day Care lens when they visit the principal office and educator's homes or venue.




Depending on the size of the Family Day Care service, more than one Authorised Officer may conduct the A&R, and a number of Family Day Care residences or venues may be visited.

In a small service with two or three educators, they may visit them all, while in large services the sample of residences and venues visited should reflect the diversity that exists in the service.

While referred to in the law as "authorised officers", job titles can vary across states and territories depending on their role and the RA.



Source: Brooke's Little Stars FDC – Nambucca Valley FDC.

	Observe – what children, families, educators, co-ordinators and staff members are doing (for example, engaging in caring, friendly and respectful interactions).
	Discuss – why and how particular practices occur at the service, with the approved provider, nominated supervisor, educators, co-ordinators, family day care educators, assistants or staff members.
	Sight – documentation provided as evidence to support particular practices at the service (for example, records of attendance, enrolment records, policies and procedures, meeting minutes, safety checklists, newsletters, photos, collections of children’s work and documentation of child assessments or evaluations).

To discover if your program is child-centred (NQS Element 1.1.2) for example:

- ▶ They would **Observe** your experiences, how your learning environments are set up and how children are playing in it
- ▶ You would **Discuss** why you planned for these experiences and how they relate to individual children and
- ▶ They would **Sight** documentation such as the program and observations of children’s learning that supports what they are observing and what you are saying.

The National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is part of the National Regulations and includes seven Quality Areas that are important to children’s learning and developmental outcomes and meeting these means your practice aligns with the high benchmark set out by each Standard. This is the minimum standard for the quality of education and care you are required to provide in your service.

GOOD TO KNOW!

The **Law** establishes the rules for providers and services, the **Regulations** provide the details or operational requirements on how you meet the Law and the **NQS** sets the benchmark for quality of the education and care you provide for children in your service.

Each Quality Area has two standards, except Quality Area 1, which has three. These standards are high-level outcome statements. Under each standard are elements that describe the outcomes that contribute to the standard being achieved. Each standard and element includes concepts that support you to reflect on and understand how you meet the standard.

A&R and the notion of continuous improvement is within Quality Area 7 Governance and Leadership of the National Quality Standard, specifically 7.2.1 Continuous improvement.

7.2	Leadership	Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.
7.2.1	Continuous improvement	There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place.

The NQS Ratings

The Authorised Officer from your RA will rate your services against the NQS and give your whole service a rating for each of the seven quality areas and an overall rating based on these results. There are five quality rating levels, these are:



Ratings must be always displayed at your service. In addition to the rating certificate, you can request an NQS rating logo to promote your rating. You can request this logo through the National Registers and StartingBlocks on the ACECQA website. Use or display of the logos is voluntary. The logos do not replace the ratings certificate that all assessed and rated services must display. The quality ratings are published on the national registers and StartingBlocks.gov.au.

It is important for your role as a service leader or educator to understand how the NQS and the assessment rating process work together to contribute to high quality education and care.

The Authorised Officer will assess each element of the NQS as ‘met’ or ‘not met’. This then indicates if the Standard is meeting the NQS or not. One ‘not met’ means the Standard is not rated as ‘meeting’. Once each standard is assessed, the quality area ratings are calculated.

The below example shows how quality ratings are calculated. All the elements in Standard 7.2 were rated as met and what’s not included here is that all the Standards in 7.1 were also met. This would have meant a ‘meeting’ rating for Quality Area 7, however, there was also evidence of the three

Exceeding themes in both 7.1 and 7.2. As all standards within Quality Area 7 were rated Exceeding the NQS, they received an overall Exceeding rating for Quality Area 7.

If, however, one of the exceeding themes were not present but they still had all elements met, they would receive a meeting rating. If all standards within a quality area are rated at least Meeting NQS, but not all standards are rated Exceeding NQS, the rating for the Quality Area will be Meeting NQS.

When determining an overall service rating:

- ▶ If any Quality Area has been rated as Working Towards NQS, the overall service rating is Working Towards NQS
- ▶ If all Quality Areas are at least Meeting NQS, the overall rating is 'meeting'
- ▶ If all Quality Areas are at least Meeting NQS and four or more Quality Areas are rated as Exceeding NQS, with at least two of these being quality areas 1, 5, 6, or 7, the overall rating will be Exceeding NQS
- ▶ Services rated Exceeding NQS in all seven Quality Areas can apply to ACECQA for the Excellent rating.

STANDARD 7.2 Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.			
Element	Concept	Descriptor	Met or Not Met
7.2.1	Continuous improvement	There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement in place.	Met
7.2.2	Educational leadership	The educational leader is supported and leads the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle.	Met
7.2.3	Development of professionals	Educators, co-ordinators and staff member's performance is regularly evaluated and individual plans are in place to support learning and development	Met

Theme	Theme Description	Confirm
Theme 1	Practice is embedded in service operations.	Yes
Theme 2	Practice is informed by critical reflection.	Yes
Theme 3	Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or community.	Yes

7.2	Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.	Exceeding NQS
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STANDARD 7.2	Analysis Notes
	The service has well established systems to support the continuous improvement of the services operation and the professional development of educators. Educators are provided with ongoing opportunities to develop their skills and work in varying roles to support their depth of knowledge of early childhood. The educational leader provides comprehensive support to assist and guide all educators.

Quality Area 7: Ratings Summary

STANDARD 7.1	Governance supports the operation of a quality service.	Exceeding NQS
STANDARD 7.2	Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.	Exceeding NQS
Was there evidence that: 1. there are serious concerns about the fitness and propriety of the approved provider and processes for ensuring that staff, primary nominee and co-ordinators are fit and proper, or 2. the approved provider has breached a condition on the service approval which poses an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the services, or 3. the Regulatory Authority is not satisfied that the service is being operated in compliance with the National Law and poses an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the service, or 4. there is systematic and ongoing failure to: a. address grievances and complaints, or b. requirements regarding policies and procedures, or c. requirements regarding information and record keeping, or d. notify the Regulatory Authority of relevant changes to the operation of the service, serious incidents and any complaints which allege a breach of the Law and any of a to d (of the above) poses an unacceptable risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child or children being educated and cared for by the service.		No
Provide Significant Improvement Required comments if "YES" was selected above:		N/A
QUALITY AREA 7 RATING		Exceeding NQS

In Family Day Care, an overall rating refers to the entire service, this means that Authorised Officers take the evidence they have collected from the Principal office/co-ordination unit along with the evidence collected from their visits to educators premises to determine the one rating for the whole service.

Exceeding Themes

To receive an Exceeding NQS rating a service needs to demonstrate that their practice is above and beyond what is expected at the meeting NQS level for the Standard and that the three Exceeding themes are clearly demonstrated in practice across the whole service for that Standard.

The three Exceeding themes are:

1. Practice is embedded in service operations
2. Practice is informed by critical reflection
3. Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or the community.



Find out more about the Exceeding themes, including case studies with examples of what this looks like in practice in Family Day Care, on the ACECQA website here: [Exceeding NQS | ACECQA](#)

What to expect before, during and after an A&R visit


The A&R visit is one part of the whole A&R process, and the A&R process is just one component of your broader journey towards continuous quality improvement within the National Quality Framework.

This means that your service's quality rating is not determined

by the visit alone. There are other opportunities to provide evidence of your quality practices and commitment to continuous improvement in addition to your A&R visit.

Self-assessment and quality improvement (Ongoing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Your service conducts a self-assessment to determine the quality of current practices against the NQS and linked regulatory requirements.▶ Your service identifies strengths and areas for improvement as a whole on an ongoing basis and documents this as part of the SA and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
Notice of start of process (Week 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Once your service has been notified in writing that the A&R process has commenced, the Authorised Officer will begin a desktop review of your service. This includes looking at your service's A&R history, compliance history and current QIP or SA when submitted.

**Quality
Improvement Plan
(Week 3–4)**






- Your QIP or Self- Assessment (in NSW) is submitted to the Regulatory Authority before the visit, along with any additional information they may ask for.
- One of the key improvements currently occurring nationally is an enhanced focus on your self- assessment and QIP as part of your continuous quality improvement, rather than as a point in time preparation for A&R.
- Another key improvement currently occurring nationally to make A&R more effective, will be a shorter notice period of 1–5 days for most A&R visits: ACECQA believes the adjusted notice period will promote best practice in ECEC service delivery, one that is ‘always ready’ for quality A&R. This meets the intent of observing and assessing typical practice, rather than practice which has been specifically prepared for A&R.
- For some services, such as some rural and remote services and single-educator models, longer notice will be provided to enable appropriate access to the service and availability of educators.

Visit (Week 5–8)



- The Authorised Officer visits your service. You may also have an opportunity for an online meet and greet before the visit with your Authorised Officer, principal office/coordination unit team and chosen educators.
- The Authorised Officer gathers evidence using an ‘observe, discuss, sight’ approach. They will observe practice, have discussions with service leaders and educators, and sight documentation. Minor adjustments may occur during this step.
- A visit will include attending the principal office of the Family Day Care service and a sample of educators. The Authorised Officer will give notice of the educator sample to be visited. The provider may be asked to submit their family day care register to support this decision.
- Depending on the size of the Family Day Care service, more than one Authorised Officer may conduct the A&R, and a number of Family Day Care residences or venues may be visited. In a small service with two or three educators, they may visit them all, while in large services the sample of residences and venues visited should reflect the diversity that exists in the service.

<p>Feedback on draft report (3–5 weeks after the visit)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Your service receives the draft A&R report. ▶ Your service can give feedback on any factual inaccuracies in the report and evidence to support feedback.
<p>Final report and notice of final ratings issued to provider</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Feedback considered before final report is finalised and issued. ▶ You can apply to the regulatory authority for a First-Tier review of your service’s quality ratings using the NQA IT System. This must be completed and submitted within 14 calendar days of receiving the final A&R report. ▶ You can apply to ACECQA for a Second-Tier review after your first tier review has been completed. This review is conducted by a Ratings Review Panel.
<p>Ratings published on national registers</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Once the review period has ended, the final ratings are published on the national registers on the ACECQA website and on the Starting Blocks website. ▶ If a second-tier review (undertaken by ACECQA) is not requested by your service, the A&R process is complete. The Regulatory Authority will send the AP the ratings certificate which is to be displayed at the service. NQS rating logos can be requested from ACECQA for services to use in promoting their overall quality rating to families.

A final key improvement is the increased use of partial A&R where the regulatory authority reassesses any aspect or element of a service that has a current 2018 National Quality Standard rating.

Reach out to your Regulatory Authority to find out about what this looks like in your state or territory.

Being prepared for A&R builds confidence

The next section includes some practical top tips for ways to prepare for A&R. The NSW Department of Education [Assessment and Rating for Family Day Care Educators](#) resource is also helpful.

On the day of the visit



- ▶ Request a coordinator support you.
- ▶ Have documents ready and easily accessible for the Authorised Officer to sight.
- ▶ Welcome the Authorised Officer as you would a guest in your home.
- ▶ Introduce the children to the Authorised Officer.
- ▶ Be with the children, engage in experiences and your usual rhythm of the day.
- ▶ Discuss your program and why you have chosen the experiences for that day including any critical reflections

you have engaged with your coordinator, families and children about the program and children's learning and development.

- ▶ Shine – share why you love Family Day Care.
- ▶ Confidently ask the Authorised Officer to repeat, reframe a question or for more time to think about the answer.
- ▶ Ask the Authorised Officer is there anything else they would like to see (observe), for you to say (discuss) or for you to show (sight).

Before the visit

Tip 1: The Key Contact Person



Choose a key contact person to connect with and begin a relationship with the Authorised Officer. They will be the key contact between your service and the Authorised Officer.

Tip 2: Know Your Stuff!



Know the regulatory requirements.

Add quality improvement, reflective practice and the National Quality Standard as an agenda item to meetings. This is evidence of critical reflection.

Tip 3: Resources



Find quality resources to support you to become familiar with the NQS. Start with [the Meeting the NQS resources](#) on the ACECQA website for an easy to understand summary of each Quality Area.

Remember to also read and share the Family Day Care specific resources.

Tip 4: Review and Update your Service Philosophy



Start by reflecting on your service philosophy. Remember your Authorised Officer will have read this before they visit and will be looking for practice that aligns with this. Invite everyone to read your philosophy.

Review and update your philosophy. Include your educators, families and children in the review. Invite them to share what they like about coming to/working in Family Day Care?

Your service's statement of philosophy tells the unique story of your service and your vision for children and families. It guides all the decisions you make for and with children, it's the why behind what you do and how you do it.

Does your philosophy do this?

Tip 5: Self-assess



Self-assessment involves analysing ‘what you do’ against the National Law and Regulations (compliance) and the standards and elements of each NQS quality area.

Do a self-assessment of your service as a service leader or educator and use the outcomes of your self-assessment to update your QIP. Think about, question, critically reflect on with others as you ask What are our key practices? What are our strengths? What are our opportunities for improvement?

‘Walk in an Authorised Officer shoes’. What do you notice?

Step 1: Compliance

- ▶ Start with compliance. Check you are complying with the relevant regulatory requirements for each Quality Area.
- ▶ You can refer to Chapter 4 of the [Guide to the NQF](#) to determine whether your service is complying with the operational requirements for each Quality Area. This chapter includes assessment of Family Day Care residences and approved Family Day Care venues.

- ▶ Use [ACECQA’S Self-Assessment Tool](#) or [NSW Department of Education’s – Working Document](#) to guide you through the self-assessment process and to identify whether you are compliant or non-compliant in accordance with the National Law and Regulations.



Australian Children’s
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Self-assessment Tool

The most effective improvements to service delivery
are initiated from within the service.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE:

If you identify a non-compliance, take action to address the issue.

Step 2: Key Practices

- ▶ Identify your key practices against the NQS.
- ▶ Identify/reflect on what you do well, practices that make you proud and that you'd like to showcase as a service and as an educator (strengths).
- ▶ Take and share photos of quality practice as evidence and map against the Quality Areas/Standards/Elements.
- ▶ Choose a Quality Area to focus/reflect on in meetings and document practice in a mind map.
- ▶ When reflecting on the evidence gathered during the self-assessment determine if you consider the element to be met or not.
- ▶ Use [NSW Family Day Care Association's *What to See, Saw and Show for Family Day Care Educators*](#) to help you identify which practice fits within which Quality Area as well as any opportunities for improvement. This has been updated in 2023.
- ▶ Use the reflective questions in Section 3 of the [Guide to the NQF](#) under each Standard of each Quality Area to

prompt reflection on the quality of education and practice. Specifically, the ones for Family Day Care.



‘Walk in an Authorised Officer’s shoes’:

‘Walk in an Authorised Officer’s shoes’ to see your service through their eyes. Begin your service self-assessment by identifying what an Authorised Officer might observe, discuss or sight about the quality of your practices and programs. Ask can I see the practice? Can the educator talk about the practice including why they do it? Do they have evidence to support their practice?

Step into each NQS and Element over time to identify areas of strength and opportunities for quality improvement.

When documenting key practices:

- ▶ Refer to ***What to See, Say and Show for Family Day Care Educators*** and **Section 3 of the Guide to the NQF**
- ▶ Use **keywords** from the Standard and Element descriptors
- ▶ Be **specific**
- ▶ Be **honest** and
- ▶ Make your practice **visible**.

Here’s an example for Quality Area 1:

Quality Area 1 – Educational program and practice	
Standard 1.3 Assessment and planning	Educators and co-ordinators take a planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child.
Element 1.3.1 Assessment and planning cycle	Each child’s learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection.

If this Element is an area of quality, you would:

See or Observe:

- ▶ Educators using their knowledge of each child to reflect on their program and planning and how it supports that child.
- ▶ Educators observing and recording information about each child's learning and development including what they know, can do and understand.
- ▶ Educators being intentional in the strategies they use to plan leisure-based experiences.
- ▶ Documentation of children's learning displayed.

The educator would say or discuss:

- ▶ How they document each child's learning, interests, ideas, knowledge and abilities to use for future planning.
- ▶ How they decide on the meaningful or wow moments to document and assess.
- ▶ Ways they involve families and children in the planning and assessment of the program.
- ▶ How the service's Educational Leader supports them.

- ▶ What strategies are used to seek feedback from children and record their voices and perspectives in assessment, planning and evaluation.
- ▶ How educators analyse the information that is gathered about each child to make assessments of each child's progress towards specific learning outcomes.

The educator will show you and you will sight:

- ▶ Children's documentation such as work samples as it supports the planning cycle.
- ▶ Observations and analysis of children's learning with suggested follow up experiences that have informed the program.
- ▶ The service's philosophy.
- ▶ The policy on implementation of an educational program.
- ▶ Evidence that families have been encouraged to provide information about their children.
- ▶ Evidence of reflections about children's learning and their practices with their EL/co-ordinator how these influenced changes in their practices and the program.

Step 3: Plan for Improvement – Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

After reviewing the outcomes of your self-assessment against the NQS and legislation it is now time to consider the strengths that have been identified and the areas for quality improvement. Use the Outcomes of your Self-Assessment to Develop your QIP.

- ▶ Decide which areas you would like to improve on (goals)
- ▶ Think about how you will achieve your goals. These will become your strategies
- ▶ Add your service strengths (key practices) and areas for improvement (goals) into your QIP
- ▶ Regularly update your QIP (at least once a year as required by Regulation 56).



Tip 6 Practice, Practice, Practice



Practice talking about your practice.

Practice:

- ▶ Talking about and describing your practices and the philosophy behind these.
- ▶ Clearly communicating and showcasing the ‘what, why and how you do what you do’ with other educators, your families, your coordinator, your Educational Leader.
- ▶ Using the language of the *Early Years Learning Framework*, *My Time, Our Place* and NQS.
- ▶ Inviting others to share their thoughts and together critically reflect on each other’s practices.
- ▶ Rehearsing for the A&R visit by building a bank of phrases you might use and being involved in the ‘walk in the Authorised Officer’s shoes’ strategy.

Remember if you know what to expect, engage in an ongoing cycle of reflection and continuous improvement and are prepared for A&R, you are more likely to feel comfortable with the process. When you feel more comfortable with

the process, you are more likely to look forward to the opportunity to share and celebrate your awesome practices. You will see A&R as less scary and more a time to shine! It’s also a great opportunity to advocate for Family Day Care and grow professionally.

We wish you all the best for your continuous improvement journey, your A&R when you are called and thank you for your ongoing commitment to quality education and care for children.



This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Assessment and Rating in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket





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